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A local doctor (*Amchi*) was called in to attend the sick man, who was given certain purgatives which were vomited as soon as they were administered. The duration of the deceased's illness was only one day.

Having heard that the body was to be disposed of by mutilation, my curiosity was aroused, and I determined to witness the ceremony first-hand. To achieve this end I was obliged to simulate great interest in the local religion, and professed myself an ardent Buddhist. To my surprise I received consent to follow the funeral cortège, and to be present at the actual ceremony of mutilation.

The place where the mutilation ceremony was performed was on a small hillock by the side of the Spiti river, about a mile and a half from the village. Eight men carried the dead man on an improvised bier made of four rough pieces of wood crossed in such a way as to form a square shaped seat. Immediately after death the deceased's neck was broken by one of his relations. The lower part of his right leg having been flexed at the knee joint and placed over the middle third of the left thigh, so that the calf muscle was clearly in evidence, a yak hair rope was passed in a figure of eight round the leg, thigh, and neck, bringing the head down very close to the knee. The corpse thus trussed was placed on the bier, with two relatives leading the funeral procession. Behind the eight bearers of the corpse came some villagers amongst whom were two men, one carrying a log of wood, and the other an axe and hunting knife.

FIG. 3: CARRYING THE DEAD MAN FOR MUTILATION.

About two furlongs from the village the procession reached a prayer wall. At this point the two men leading the procession returned to their own village bearing flags and a banner with a goddess painted upon it.

On arrival at the site of the mutilation ceremony, the body was taken out of the bier, and the clothes and funeral ornaments stripped from the dead man so as to expose him naked. Two lamas (priests) then took up a position about thirty feet from the corpse, and faced eastwards, whilst another lama squatted on the ground to the south of the site of mutilation. These men held ritualistic instruments in their hands, and muttered prayers.

In the meantime, the executioner on whom the main business of mutilation devolved, placing himself in front of the corpse drew it over to a flat stone just visible above the ground. Then, after cutting the rope which secured the deceased lest he should rise and do some harm, he laid the dead body on the stone with its knees in a flexed position. This done, he placed the log of wood under the cervical region, cutting with his hunting knife the skin, fascia, muscles, and other soft structures of the neck. Then taking the axe from his girdle, he severed the head from the body, and placed it close by. He now proceeded to open up the abdomen. First, he caught the abdominal wall in the epigastric region with his left hand, and with his right he introduced his knife at the tip of the xiphoid and cut the abdominal wall horizontally, and the flap thus made was turned downwards over the pubic region.

On opening the abdomen faeculent fluid gushed out. The small and large intestines were semi-distended and bulging. It being of great importance to ascertain the disease which caused the deceased's death, the mutilator used a small piece of stick to elevate and examine the intestines. His verdict was that the man had died from a fatal bilious attack, though so far as I could see the liver was quite normal.

Standing close to the body I could see that the intestines were distended, and part of the small intestine was chocolate colour (gangrenous). Besides this it had the appearance of having been ruptured and perforated, which fact rather confirms my belief that the extremely violent aperients administered to the man during his brief illness produced these disastrous results.

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764 767 [118] The operation of opening the abdomen completed, the executioner disarticulated the left ileo-femoral joint by first cutting the soft structures, fascia, and tendons around it, though there appeared to be little system in his procedure. Huge pieces of flesh were sliced from the thigh and buttock down to the knee, these being thrown on to a large flat stone nearby. When the joints at the hip and knee were cleared of flesh, the tendons and fascia were severed, and the femoral bone was disarticulated and laid on one side. (This bone was specially kept to convert into a lama's human thigh bone trumpet.) That part of the leg below the knee, he chopped with an axe into big chunks, throwing these on the slab of stone also. Followed the hacking off of the right arm near the insertion of the deltoid muscle, after which the whole of that limb was chopped in lumps and likewise placed with the other pieces of flesh. The next step was to extract the contents of the abdomen, i.e., intestines, liver, spleen, and stomach, placing these on the already large pile of flesh, et ceteras. The pleural cavity was then opened by cutting and hacking the ribs with his axe, and the lungs and heart were severed from their adhesions with his hunting knife, these organs being similarly thrown on the stone nearby.

The right leg was then treated similarly to the left; after which the left arm was mutilated and disposed of. This done, the spinal column was hacked in pieces, the ileum and sacrum being also treated similarly.

I noticed that the mutilator did not dissect and mutilate the head which he had chopped off in the early stages of the ceremony, but threw it down the bank of the river.

826 787 It is commonly believed that so long as the head lies in close proximity to the rest of the mutilated parts of the corpse, carrion birds and beasts of prey will not approach. Towards sunset, the time at which the mutilation ceremony took place, I saw no birds about, and this was thought by the relatives to be an ill omen. Further, if they should not appear within one or two days, the deceased is deemed to have been very wicked during his life-time.

764 782 767 The current theory to justify the disposal of a corpse by mutilation, is that thereby the dead cannot rise again. Others, however, affirm that human flesh is a special delicacy which the gods enjoy.

In Spiti, the office of mutilator of corpses is not hereditary, nor does it belong to a professional class of executioners, the members of which are not allowed near the precincts of a temple, as is the usage in Central Tibet. The corpse mutilator is usually a relative of the deceased.

When this task is completed, he returns to the deceased's house, outside of which is placed a vessel of warm water so that he can bathe himself and change his clothes. In return for his services, he is well fed and paid by the family to which the deceased belonged.

BHAGWAN SINGH.

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